

Leo Strauss

The Thesmophoriazusai



This play begins like the *Birds* with a dialogue between two Athenian citizens, but one of these citizens is Euripides. Accordingly, whereas in the *Birds* there could be some doubt as to which of the two Athenians was responsible for the design leading to the action of that play, there can be no doubt that in the present play the design stems from the clever poet. At the beginning Mnesilochos, a kinsman of Euripides by marriage, complains to the poet about being dragged around by him since the early morning without ever being told their destination. The first words of the play remind us of the beginning of the *Clouds*, but the *Thesmophoriazusai* is the only play that literally begins with "O Zeus." Euripides refuses to tell his companion where he is leading him: There is no need for him to hear what he is about to see. The kinsman takes Euripides to mean that there is no need of his hearing anything; he understands as meant absolutely what was meant qualifiedly. The wise man has in mind the natural difference between the sphere within which seeing with one's own eyes is properly supreme and listening to tradition is more or less out of place, and the sphere within which listening to tradition is just because seeing with one's own eyes is impossible—a distinction that is founded on the natural difference between seeing simply and hearing simply. Although or because the kinsman is aware of Euripides' speaking cleverly, he understands him to mean that he should neither hear nor see on the ground that the nature of not hearing differs from that of not seeing. Euripides does not even try to contest the kinsman's conclusion—perhaps there are people who should not or can not see or hear—but he answers his question as to how the nature of not hearing differs from that of not seeing by tracing that difference to Ether's devising. The kinsman is again unable to understand, and his lack of understanding again does not prevent him from being filled with admiration for Euripides' wisdom; he thus for-

gets again for a while his becoming lame through being dragged around by the wise man. Fortunately, with a few more steps the two men arrive at their destination. Euripides shows his kinsman a small door (24-25; cf. *Clouds* 91-92) so that he does not have to hear about it any more, but can gaze at it silently. Yet since the meaning of the small door is not visible, he is still in need of hearing; he must therefore be silent and hear, i.e., see and hear. He hears from Euripides that the door belongs to the house of the tragic poet Agathon. The kinsman, to the best of his knowledge, has never seen that Agathon, but Euripides is certain that the kinsman has had sexual relations with that notorious pathic homosexual. A servant of Agathon emerges through the door with fire and myrtles in order to sacrifice, as Euripides surmises, for the success of Agathon's poetic activity. Euripides and the kinsman hide in order to observe the doings of the servant, who solemnly calls for reverent silence, not only of human beings, but of the ether, the sea, the birds, and the savage beasts as well, because Agathon is about to begin a drama; the immense solemnity of the reverent silence is called for by the immense artfulness or artificiality of Agathon's poetry. The kinsman, who is heard and not seen, accompanies the solemn utterance with expressions of disgust about the bombast or the boasting. When the servant becomes fully aware of the presence of someone uninitiated, first the kinsman and then Euripides comes out of hiding. A hostile exchange between the servant and the kinsman is stopped authoritatively by Euripides, who commands the servant to call out Agathon. The servant, who knows what he owes to his master's dignity and hence his own, regards the command as a supplication and replies that Agathon will soon come out uncalled because since it is winter the poet needs the warmth of the sun in order to make his poems properly flexible. Euripides is greatly annoyed at the short delay thus imposed on him. The kinsman does not understand that impatience because he does not know why Euripides is eager to see Agathon, i.e., why the poet has dragged him around since the early morning: The great man is in the habit of giving commands without giving explanations; he is in the habit of concealing his intentions. He now tells his kinsman that on this day his very life is at stake; the women assembled for the Thesmophoria will pass judgment on his criminal offense, which consists in his treating them tragically and speaking ill of them. He wishes to persuade the tragic poet Agathon to go to the women's assembly disguised as a woman in order to defend him if necessary. The kinsman is impressed by Euripides' clever conceit: In contradistinction to the womanish Agathon, who is notorious for his

womanish sexuality, Euripides is too much of a man to play a woman.

The theme of the play is then the persecution of a poet. We witnessed the persecution of a poet in the *Acharnians*; but in that play the persecuted man was not persecuted as a poet. He was a comic poet; he was in danger of being put to death immediately without the benefit of a trial; and he escaped persecution by making some borrowings from the tragic poet Euripides. Now Euripides himself is persecuted on account of his poetry; and he can not escape persecution with the means at his disposal, but must have recourse to the help of another tragic poet. Euripides has much in common with Socrates. We witnessed the persecution of Socrates in the *Clouds*, but Socrates was not politically or judicially persecuted because he had offended only one man, and his rhetoric made him immune to judicial persecution; Euripides, however, has offended the whole womanhood (of Athens), and his rhetoric can not be of any use to him since his case will be decided in an assembly in which he can not lawfully appear. In the *Clouds* we were made witnesses to Socrates' crimes because these crimes were not generally known; Euripides' crimes, committed through his tragedies, were generally known. The exchange between Euripides and his kinsman reminds us of the exchange between Socrates and Strepsiades; all the more striking are the differences between the two pairs. Socrates was not responsible for the design that led to the action of the *Clouds*, and he was quite helpless in the face of Strepsiades' action against him; Euripides, however, is alone responsible for the design that leads to the action of the *Thesmophoriazusai*. While there can be some doubt as to whether Socrates or Strepsiades is the chief character of the *Clouds*, and hence some doubt as to the degree of Socrates' guilt, there can be no doubt that Euripides is the chief character of the *Thesmophoriazusai*. Euripides is persecuted because he treats the women tragically and speaks evil of them. Treating someone tragically is of course no offense, but treating someone comically is about the same as speaking evil of him; Aristophanes was accused by his enemies and especially by Kleon of having treated comically the city and the *demos*;⁷⁵ the ground of Euripides' persecution will appear to be less grave or more proper to comedy than the ground of Aristophanes' persecution, to say nothing here of Socrates' persecution.

Agathon appears in a surprising manner. It had been announced twice (66, 70) that he would come out. In fact, he is wheeled out by means of a theatrical machine. He becomes visible in the same manner in which Euripides himself had become visible in the *Acharnians* (408-9), yet it

was not necessary to knock at his door as it had been to knock at the door of Euripides and at the door of Socrates; in contradistinction to Euripides and Socrates, Agathon appears uncalled. He looks almost altogether like a spoiled and lascivious woman. Working on a tragedy, he sings a hymn partly in the character of a chorus of maidens who as such are easily persuaded to revere the gods, but do not know which gods they should praise; they are told to praise Apollon, Artemis, and Leto in honor of the two goddesses (Demeter and Persephone) celebrated on the Thesmophoria. Euripides is silent about the song. His kinsman tells Agathon that the song is of womanish and lascivious sweetness and that it arouses in him the kind of sexual desire for which Agathon is notorious, although he himself is quite old, but that the poet is for him a complete riddle: There are some obvious signs that he is a young man, while there are other equally obvious signs that he is a woman; is one reduced to determining Agathon's sex on the basis of his song? In addressing his question to Agathon he makes explicit use of some Aeschylean verses, verses that in Aeschylus' drama had been addressed to Dionysos. Agathon is therefore not offended. He replies in effect that his sex can not be discerned from his song, since the poet always adapts himself to his subject. His garb and manner is feminine, i.e., he imitates women, when he composes women's dramas; if he were to compose men's dramas, his body would supply him with the fundamental characteristic. Since he abhors everything rude and crude, he would never compose a satyr play. What is important for the poet is not that he is very masculine but that he is beautiful by nature: A beautiful poet will produce beautiful dramas whether the subjects are men or women, provided he takes care of his natural beauty by adorning himself appropriately through manners and garb. Agathon justifies the extremely artificial character of his poetry by tracing it to his nature; he has as beautiful a nature as any other poet, but he differs from the other poets because his nature is not very masculine, not to say that it is hermaphroditic; yet precisely this fact links him with the god of the theater himself.

Euripides listened to the exchange between his kinsman and Agathon in silence. We take it that he would not have praised Agathon's performance, least of all in the present situation where praise would appear to be mercenary, to say nothing of the fact that a man like Euripides is thrifty with his praise in any circumstances. The kinsman's open blame of Agathon can not have been altogether to Euripides' liking, since he is in need of Agathon's help, but Agathon's deft handling of the kinsman augured well

for his hoped-for handling of the women; his self-justification amounted to the ablest and highest self-praise. Thus the exchange between the kinsman and Agathon is from Euripides' point of view better than Euripides' praise of Agathon's performance would have been. Yet now he can not wait any longer. He puts a stop to the exchange between the two others by saying that Agathon's manner of being is of the same kind as his own had been at the beginning of his career as a poet: He does not say a word about Agathon's song. He frankly states that he has come to Agathon as a suppliant since the women are about to destroy him because he speaks evil of them; Agathon alone can save him by attending the women's assembly in the guise of a woman and by speaking there on his behalf: Agathon alone would speak in a manner worthy of Euripides. To Agathon's question why he does not defend himself in the women's assembly, he replies that in the first place he is well known and that secondly, being an old and bearded man, he does not have the looks or the voice of a woman as Agathon has. Agathon simply refuses to comply with Euripides' request because of the danger that he would incur; he bases his refusal on Euripides' own prudent or lifesaving teaching; Euripides should risk his own hide. The kinsman is indignant about the pathetic Agathon's refusal, but Euripides refrains from antagonizing Agathon; he merely claims to be in a state of despair. He thus arouses the compassion of his kinsman, who has probably never seen or heard the wise man despairing and who asks him therefore to use him in any way he likes. Euripides accepts the offer without a second's hesitation and with alacrity: The kinsman will have to take the place originally assigned to Agathon in the women's assembly. But the kinsman looks perhaps even less like a woman than Euripides. This does not induce Euripides for a moment to consider that he himself might go to the women's assembly disguised as a woman. He therefore turns to Agathon with the request that he lend him the utensils with whose help the kinsman could be made to look like a woman. Agathon is as obliging to Euripides as Euripides himself was to Dikaiopolis. Euripides shaves and sings the kinsman with Agathon's razor and torch. The poor old man suffers considerable discomfort, but he bears it quite well. Thereafter Euripides asks Agathon for various pieces of women's clothing, adding the words "Of these things at any rate you will not say they are not." (251) Agathon, whom we have seen and heard composing a hymn to certain gods while he was assimilating himself to pious maidens, never swears by any gods, like Euripides in the corresponding scene of the *Acharnians*. Agathon of course obliges Euripides, who clothes the kinsman as a woman

with the utmost care; while he is being dressed, the kinsman develops a womanish concern with his looks. As soon as Agathon has supplied Euripides with the last piece of the clothing needed, he has himself wheeled in. The only things that remain to be done by Euripides are to warn his kinsman to imitate a woman's voice and, on the kinsman's request, to swear that he will save him by all means if some evil should befall him. At first Euripides swears not by Zeus but by ether, the dwelling of Zeus, and when the kinsman finds that a mere dwelling is nothing to swear by, he swears by all gods. The kinsman is not altogether assured because of Euripides' alleged justification of perjury in his *Hippolytos*. Still, he obeys Euripides' order to hurry to the assembly of the women. Euripides himself goes home.

It was a piece of good luck for Euripides that he had his kinsman with him when his hope that Agathon would come to his rescue was dashed. In other words, it could seem that Aristophanes has provided for a way out, which Euripides himself had not provided for, or that Aristophanes claims to be cleverer than the clever Euripides. In a sense this is precisely Aristophanes' claim, as appears from the *Frogs*, but one must not underestimate Aristophanes' respect for Euripides' cleverness. We have no right to disregard the possibility that Euripides took his kinsman with him because he reckoned with the possibility that Agathon might not comply with his supplication. The womanish and clever Agathon, who obviously was not the target of the women's persecution, would have been the most desirable defender of Euripides; but Agathon could not be expected to have a sufficiently strong motive of friendship to endanger himself for the sake of his overpowering rival. The kinsman, on the other hand, despite his twofold defect, has the strong motive of kinship—be it only kinship by marriage—to come to Euripides' aid (210). The demonstration *ad oculos* of Agathon's refusal will make it unnecessary for Euripides to supplicate or to command his kinsman to come to his help; the kinsman sees with his own eyes that Euripides would never have inconvenienced him or exposed him to danger if there had been an alternative. This is to say nothing of the fact that Euripides would under any circumstances have needed access to articles of feminine toilet belonging to a man, since no woman must know of the presence of a man in the women's assembly: Agathon's house is the best place where the kinsman can be dressed as a woman. We may also note here that Euripides, as distinguished from Socrates, has a kinsman who offers to help him against his persecutors: Socrates' constant companion Chairephon could not be of any help to Socrates, since he was

implicated in the same accusation as his revered master (*Clouds* 1505-7). Euripides' guilt may be more notorious than Socrates', and the poet may therefore be in greater danger than Socrates; but on the other hand the poet is not as isolated as the man whose chief concern is to think or to worry about the things aloft.

The kinsman enters the temple in which the women are assembling. Acting as a woman, he pretends to sacrifice to Demeter and Persephone and prays to them at least to grant him escape from detection today and to grant his (her) daughter a most desirable husband, a man both rich and stupid. A woman acting as a herald calls on the women assembled to pray to Demeter, Persephone, and five other gods or groups of gods that the present assembly may be beneficial to the city of Athens and to the women of Athens, and that the view of that woman be victorious who in deed and speech deserves the best of the *demos* of the Athenians and the *demos* of the women; the herald also asks the women to pray each for her own well-being. The chorus of women then invokes gods not mentioned by the herald (Zeus, Apollon, Athena, Artemis, Poseidon, the Nereids, and the Oreads). The herald next calls on the women to pray to all gods and curses all those who plot against the *demos* of women, who negotiate with Euripides and the Persians to the detriment of the women, who denounce an adulterous wife to her husband, or who harm any woman in any way. The chorus of women then joins in this prayer, omitting in particular the curse of Euripides, but adding that those who reveal secrets to the enemies act impiously and commit an unjust act against the city. Finally, the herald announces in due form that the chief subject on the agenda of today's assembly is what punishment is to be inflicted on Euripides, his guilt being admitted by all women. The solemnity of the proceedings in the women's assembly brings out the sacrilege committed by Euripides' kinsman at Euripides' instigation. The sacrilegious character of Euripides' act is as much underlined as made light of by the fact that those proceedings ridiculously imitate the pious solemnities that opened the assemblies of the Athenian people. The sacrilege is committed by Aristophanes, rather than by Euripides.

The first speaker shows how many bad things Euripides says about the women. She enumerates seven epithets or calumnies with which the poet has insulted her sex in his tragedies. She goes on to say that his words have led to deeds. By presenting the women's ways in the theater, he has made it impossible or very difficult for the women to continue in these ways (for instance, in adultery and the supposition of infants). He has made the

men thoroughly suspicious of the women; he has taught the husbands to use precautions regarding their wives that had never occurred to them before. It goes without saying that they no longer trust their wives' fidelity; they do not even any longer trust their wives' honesty in administering the household. Let Euripides, that teacher of evil, that destroyer of households, be condemned to death by poison or in any other way. Other charges against him that are not fit to be publicly pronounced will be deposited by the speaker in writing with the recorder. The chorus is altogether pleased with her speech; the women never heard a better woman speaker. The praise is surprising: The first accuser did not question the truth of Euripides' denunciations of the women. The second speaker says that she will add only a few points to the others so well stated by the first speaker. Yet, although she does not say it and perhaps does not even know it, her accusation of Euripides is much graver than that made by her predecessor. She does not make the poet responsible for the women's loss of illicit pleasures or gains. She—the poor mother of five small children, whose husband perished on a large island ⁷⁶—has lost more than half of her income, barely sufficient at the outset, through Euripides: She makes her living by selling wreaths, and Euripides has persuaded the men that there are no gods; therefore the men no longer buy wreaths to be used in the worship of the gods. She urges all her fellow women to punish Euripides; she does not demand that he be punished capitally. Her speech is very short; she has to hurry to the market in order to take care of what is left of her business. The chorus proves to be more intelligent than the simple-minded florist; it finds her speech more intelligent than the first speech: She has set Euripides' *hybris* beyond any doubt. The second speech is superior to the first speech because it sets forth charges that can be stated publicly, while the first speaker's charges are utterable only behind the backs of the men, of the *demos*, or the city. The florist urges the women to punish Euripides "for many reasons": She does not add, as Hermes added at the end of the *Clouds*, "But chiefly since you know that he acted unjustly against the gods." ⁷⁷ Euripides' atheism is of interest to her only because of its ruinous effect on her livelihood. Needless to say, this does not mean that she is indifferent as to whether the gods are: Euripides did not persuade the women that there are no gods. It means that Euripides' denial is wholly incomprehensible to her, even more incomprehensible, if this is possible, than Socrates' denial was to Strepsiades. She does not stoop to accuse Euripides of impiety because the poet's manifestly absurd contention can not be taken seriously in itself, but only

with a view to its adverse effect on her livelihood; the poor woman is not aware, as Strepsiades is at the end of the *Clouds*, that the denial of the gods has had or could have an adverse effect on everybody or on the whole city. Nothing would have been easier for the poet than to present the compassion-arousing war widow accusing Euripides of atheism in order to arouse the greatest ire against him, so that he would be completely ruined for having half-ruined her; nothing would have been easier for the poet than to present religious persecution as rooted in economic interest; he failed to do so. The superior woman's leaving at once by itself makes it almost certain that Euripides' denial of the existence of the gods will not play a role in the rest of the play.

The two accusers are answered by the kinsman, whose defense of the poet is quite clever. He is completely silent on the subject of Euripides' teaching atheism; he replies only to the first accuser. He says that it is not surprising that the women are very angry at Euripides, since he has given them such a bad reputation; he himself (she herself) hates him on that score. Yet, he goes on, making explicit what the first accuser had almost implied, Euripides' crime is attenuated by the fact that what he said about the women is the truth, in fact only a small part of the truth, as women among themselves may admit. He (she) tells the story of his (her) own adultery in all its details as an example of the kind of things that Euripides never made public, and then mentions four other womanly misdeeds of the same description, the central one being connected with their acts of adultery committed while their husbands are away from home on military service. The kinsman may be said to have defended Euripides in this manner: Granted that the poet has spoken ill of the women and hence harmed them; yet he could have harmed them much more than he has done; hence he is not the women's enemy. But in order to make this point, the kinsman had to be extraordinarily frank. No wonder that the chorus is shocked by his daring; it would not have believed that a woman would speak so shamelessly in the women's assembly but—come to think of it—only a woman can surpass in evil the women who are by nature shameless. The chorus surely does not deny the truth of the kinsman's (or Euripides') accusations of the women. Apparently it is paralyzed to act against the kinsman (and Euripides) by its awareness of that truth. Only one woman is not bewitched by the kinsman's speech, but insists not indeed that the proceedings against Euripides be continued but that the defender of Euripides be fittingly punished as a traitor to her sex. The punishment proposed would accidentally reveal the defender's sex and therefore be fatal

to Euripides' design. The kinsman therefore protests against being punished for justly defending Euripides. The only woman who has not succumbed to the kinsman's rhetoric replies that Euripides' defender is the only woman who has dared to defend the man who has done the women the greatest harm by presenting in his plays only bad women and never decent women like Penelope: Far from having said the truth about women, he has most unjustly suppressed the truth about them; Euripides' defender deserves unusual punishment because she has defended a grave injustice in an unusually unjust manner. The kinsman, who knows that the best defense may be an attack, defends Euripides by attacking all present-day women, i.e., by acting on the premise that the good is the old: There are no longer any women like Penelope. When this contention is indignantly denied by his sole opponent, he begins to recite another list of misdeeds of contemporary women. His opponent can only curse him and start a fight with him. If the fight were allowed to continue, the kinsman would have won it. At any rate, the solemn accusation brought by all Athenian women against Euripides leads to nothing more serious than a brawl between two women. Euripides' design has been entirely successful despite the fact, which he did not foresee, that the subject of his atheism (and even of his publicly teaching atheism) came up in the women's assembly. He owed his success ultimately to his ability—an ability that Socrates lacks—to imitate women or to make others imitate women, to his being a (dramatic) poet.⁷⁸ Accepting his kinsman's offer to defend him in the women's assembly has proved to be a wise action: Agathon could not have done better. But if this is so, why did he make the vain attempt to persuade Agathon to defend him?

The single combat between the kinsman and the woman is stopped by the chorus, which sees another woman running toward the assembly in great haste. That woman proves to be the notorious homosexual Kleisthenes, a woman of a man, who loves the women because his manner is akin to theirs. He has come to warn them of a grave matter of which he has just heard in the market place. The chorus, moved by his concern for the women and desirous to protect sweet little Kleisthenes against the evil consequences of his appearing in the women's assembly in which no man is permitted, calls him a child. Kleisthenes reports that, as people say, Euripides has sent a kinsman, an old man, into the women's assembly, after having singed him and dressed him as a woman, in order to spy on their speeches. The kinsman vainly tries to dismiss the rumor as absurd; Kleisthenes assures the women that he has heard the story from people in

the know. We are not told how the secret leaked out. We hesitate to leave it at saying that every secret of this kind can leak out and therefore the manner of its leaking out is unimportant. Kleisthenes is a pathetic homosexual, like Agathon (206, *Lysistrata* 1092). Would the secret have leaked out if Euripides had succeeded in persuading Agathon to defend him in the women's assembly? In that case Agathon would have had the greatest interest in keeping the secret. But what interest does he have in keeping the secret after Euripides' kinsman has taken the place originally assigned to him? Who does not like to tell a funny story, especially to intimates, without necessarily inquiring very deeply whether every intimate favors as much as he does the fobber rather than the fobbed? We conclude that Euripides acted wisely in attempting to persuade Agathon to defend him.

When the women hear that there is a man among them, they cease to be paralyzed; they turn with vigor to the search for him and ask Kleisthenes to join them in the search. This request is wise, for the women have to find out whether someone who both appears and claims to be a woman is not in fact a man; but in the circumstances only a man can lawfully or in propriety undress a man, and only a woman can lawfully or in propriety undress a woman. Yet the very fact that seems to call for the co-operation of men and women makes impossible the participation of either men or women in the search: The kinsman's (or Euripides') crime seems to be undetectable, or the transformation of the heard into the seen seems in the present case to be impossible. Kleisthenes tries to overcome the difficulty by a process of exclusion: All women known as women to the other women are not the man in disguise. The kinsman is the only one who fails that test. But obviously an unknown woman is not therefore a man. Yet Euripides' defender is unable to tell the name of her husband and to describe sufficiently the proceedings, known only to women, during the Thesmophoria. There is no longer a doubt that the defender is the man whom the women seek; Kleisthenes must undress him. The kinsman does everything possible to conceal his sex, but all his ingenuity is of no avail. The woman who alone among the others was not bewitched by his speech proclaims that he has been detected and thus solves the riddle of how any woman could have defended Euripides. The kinsman is naturally despondent. He is being watched by the women lest he run away while Kleisthenes informs the authorities. Not only has Euripides' design completely failed, he has now become manifestly guilty of a sacrilege, not only in the eyes of the women, but of the city. The chorus immediately begins to investigate whether there is not some other man who has entered the

women's assembly. The kinsman's half-success has obviously alarmed them to the highest degree. While engaged in their search, they are so far from being literally silent as they had intended (660) as to loudly pronounce that if they detect a man who has committed the impious act of listening to the women's proceedings, he will be punished and be an example to the other men of what happens to *hybris*, unjust deeds and godless manners. He will come to state openly that there are gods, and he will teach all human beings to worship divinities and justly to perform pious and lawful acts; if he fails to do so but is caught, both women and mortals will clearly see that a god punishes at once the lawless and impious acts. The chorus does not detect any other man. To some extent the chorus' assertion regarding the punishment of the wicked is borne out by what happened to the kinsman; he surely was not punished for his impious act by any god before he was caught by human beings. On the other hand, there is no sign that the kinsman (or Euripides), after having been detected, will declare that there are gods and will teach men to worship gods. The chorus refrains therefore from referring to the case of the kinsman or generally to the past, but speaks of the punishment of the godless only in the future tense. The always present truth that a god punishes at once the lawless and impious acts will always become manifest by the god's future action, provided those acts are discovered by human beings; the always made assertion always remains in need of future verification. This then is the reason why the women search for a man other than the kinsman who has impiously attended the women's assembly: They must reassert the law of piety. By not finding another man, they show at least that the god's failure to punish that man is in agreement with the law of piety. Be this as it may, while the women were entirely unconcerned with Euripides' atheism, to which the second accuser had drawn their attention in passing, they are now almost concerned with it as a consequence of the detection of the kinsman's impious act, which was instigated by Euripides. The detection of this impious act will lead, as one may hope, to the punishment of the poet by the city, to punishment strictly understood. For, as it seems, the women have in common with the gods that they can not, or do not, inflict punishment strictly understood. Yet how can one expect that the city will punish the poet for his impious act if, as the second accuser asserted, he has persuaded the men by his tragedies that there are no gods? This accusation seems to be borne out by the fact that the women, and not the men, state, however qualifiedly, the belief in divine punishment and hence in the existence of gods, just as the womanish

Agathon, speaking through the mouth of maidens, praised the gods. In other words, if the women lack punitive power strictly speaking, if it is absurd to speak of a *demos* of women distinct from the *demos* proper (306-7, 335-36), why is Euripides afraid of their condemning him?

While the chorus predicts the divine punishment of every man other than the kinsman who commits impious acts, the kinsman tries to protect himself against human punishment. Imitating a move that once had saved Dikaiopolis from the rage of the Acharnians, he takes her baby from the woman who had been his sole opponent and threatens to kill it if the women do not let him escape. The mother and the other women are shocked but helpless; their only comfort is that none of the immortal gods will assist him in his unjust deeds. The kinsman despises their vain talk. In accordance with this the women threaten to burn him alive in order to force him to hand over the baby. He remains firm; he is likely to disarm the women as Dikaiopolis had disarmed the Acharnians. Yet he does better than Dikaiopolis; he undresses the baby (a girl), who proves to be a flask filled with wine; the kinsman's worst enemy is discovered to have committed an impious act by not keeping the day of fasting. Yet this crime is so common among the Athenian women that the kinsman's clever move is of no help to him. Precisely because the women are as bad as Euripides said, they remain victorious. Precisely because Euripides teaches the truth (about the women), he is defeated. His cleverness is inferior to Dikaiopolis'.

The kinsman seems to be lost. Euripides had sworn to him to save him if necessary. Yet how can he let Euripides know of his distress? Fortunately he remembers a device used in a Euripidean tragedy on behalf of Palamedes. In that play the hoped-for savior was informed of Palamedes' need for help by a message written on oar blades that were thrown into the sea. The kinsman, being held far from the sea, in fact in a temple, has no oars but uses votive tablets in their stead—after all, both are of wood; instead of the sea he uses the air as a medium of transmission.

Nothing remains for him to do but to wait for his deliverance by Euripides—a deliverance that seems to be wholly impossible given the nature of the element through which his message is transmitted to the poet. Being kept under guard by the women, the kinsman has no choice but to wait on the stage. The women too wait, but they wait for the coming of the magistrate who is in charge of the kinsman's punishment. The kinsman waits as defeated men wait for the consequence of their defeat, while the women wait as victorious beings wait for the fruit of

their victory to ripen. Yet the women owed their victory to their badness. They wisely employ their wait to counteract, by staging the parabasis, the bad impression they have made on the audience. The parabasis of the *Thesmophoriazusai* has no other purpose than to prove that women are good, much better than men. It is wise of them to present this proof in the parabasis as distinguished from a debate: No one can contradict them. As is shown by the *Lysistrata*, women can prove their superiority to men in a debate with men, even with high dignitaries; but to refute Euripides (or his kinsman trained by him) is beyond any woman's power. Accordingly, in the parabasis the women prove their goodness against the charges made by men in general; yet they prove it in the presence of Euripides' kinsman, who is however muted by his defeat (caused by the women's badness) as well as by the absolute impossibility, due to convention, of anyone interrupting the parabasis. The unique features of the parabasis of this play are these: An actor is on the stage during the parabasis; in the scene preceding the parabasis the chorus was successfully debunked by the hero's ally and yet victorious over that ally, and thus the antagonism between the chorus and the hero is still unresolved during the parabasis; the parabasis consists only of the parabasis proper and the epirrhema; the parabasis is devoted to the single theme of the women's goodness. Nothing needs to be said about the chorus' silence in the parabasis as to the comic poet, or about the absence from the parabasis of any invocation of gods, even of the Muses. Its silence as to the sacrilege (to say nothing of the atheism) of the women's enemy is sufficiently explained by the fact that impiety belongs to the tribunal of competent, i.e., male, authority.

The chorus of women defends the female sex against the charge made by all that all evils that afflict human beings—among them civil and foreign war⁷⁹—stem from women. If women are altogether evil, why are men so eager to live with them, to keep them for themselves and close to themselves indoors, and to look even at women who are not their wives? The peculiar character of men's longing for women proves not only that women are not simply bad but that they are, while perhaps not simply good, at least much better than men. Each sex claims to be superior to the other. To settle this controversy with finality, it suffices to compare the names of women with those of men, for the actions agree with the names. The chorus supports this assertion by a number of contemporary examples that must have carried great weight with the audience. It might have referred to the names of Eirene and Theoria on the one hand, of Polemos and Kydoimos on the other. It might have stressed the fact that

the names of the virtues are feminine, if the same were not true of the vices. Women hardly steal, for if they do, they steal very little from their husbands, which is not theft strictly speaking, while men steal large amounts from the public treasure and in addition receive public honors as a consequence. Women are inferior to men also regarding the other crimes or vices. Above all, women are much more conservative, much better preservers of the ancestral, than men. For the reason indicated before, the chorus fails to add that since women are so much more trustworthy than men, they are much more likely than men to say the truth about the gods. The chorus does not blame men for being inferior to women. It does not even blame them for claiming to be the rightful rulers of women. Explicitly addressing the city, it merely blames it for not giving some honor to women who have given birth to good citizens, especially to good military commanders, while dishonoring the mothers of bad citizens. One may say that the women prove their superiority most convincingly by accepting the ancestral order of rank among the various kinds of beings,⁸⁰ an order not sufficiently indicated by the beauty or lack of beauty of the names of the beings concerned. Although the women's argument seems to be worthless because it is set forth while the other party is prevented from talking back, it ends by granting to the silent opponent what might be thought to be the decisive point and thus paves the way for the eventual reconciliation between them: The beings superior by nature bow to the law proclaiming their inferiority. For however inimical Euripides may be to the *nomos*, he has the *nomos* on his side in asserting the inferiority of the women; he uses indeed this partial agreement with the *nomos* for his radical attack on the *nomos*, i.e., on the gods, for the female sex is by nature more pious than the male. His way of reasoning recalls that used by the Unjust Speech.

Euripides has not responded to his kinsman's message. The kinsman believes that this is because of the poet's being ashamed of the frigid play of his that had suggested to the kinsman the notion of how the message should be sent. He decides therefore to make use of Euripides' recent *Helen* by playing Helen, who waits for her husband Menelaos just as he waits for Euripides, his kinsman by marriage. After all, he has some experience in successfully pretending to be a woman, and he is still dressed as a woman. Undisturbed by the warnings of Kritylla, the woman who acts as his guard, against trying any funny business, he begins to quote from Helen's soliloquy, which opens the *Helen*, and in which the heroine presents herself as waiting for Menelaos. He makes some changes in the

Euripidean text; in particular, he is more hopeful than Euripides' Helen of the speedy arrival of the deliverer. The hope proves to be justified; Euripides keeps his oath; his kinsman's ruin would be his own; he appears in the role of Menelaos. Did he receive his kinsman's message dispatched through the air? This would seem to be the height of impossibility, much more impossible than a *deus ex machina*, for only the gods can do everything, and the gods do not assist men in impious deeds (715-16). Yet Euripides' receiving his kinsman's message is not more impossible than Peisthetairos' founding of Cloudecuckootown. One can not say that Euripides did not receive his kinsman's message on the ground that he arrives only after the kinsman had begun to recite from the *Helen* and responds as Menelaos immediately on his arrival; for the poet would have understood the situation immediately and would act accordingly. The ensuing dialogue between Euripides-Menelaos and the kinsman-Helen culminates in the partial reproduction of the scene in the *Helen* in which Helen recognizes Menelaos, but Menelaos believes that the Helen whom he sees is only a phantom. Yet Menelaos-Euripides recognizes his kinsman-Helen who, differing from Euripides' Helen, urges the kinsman by marriage to take him (her) away with the greatest speed. Kritylla—the wife of Antitheos—who did not recognize Euripides but regarded him in accordance with his quotations from *Helen* as a stranger, had followed the dialogue between the two men without any understanding; nevertheless she is intelligent enough to oppose the kinsman's abduction. Fortunately for her the magistrate, accompanied by a Scythian archer, arrives at this moment and thus prevents the escape of the guilty man. Euripides runs away after having assured his kinsman that he will not let him down as long as he lives, unless his innumerable tricks should fail him. The dialogue between Euripides and the kinsman consists to a considerable extent of quotations from the *Helen*; Euripides uses utterances of Menelaos and once the utterance of another male character, while the kinsman uses utterances of Helen and once the utterance of a nameless old woman. By applying a verse from the *Helen* to his situation, the kinsman calls the altar a grave; he is properly rebuked for this daring act by Kritylla, which does not prevent Euripides from repeating the reprehensible act. Before she noticed the complicity of Euripides, Kritylla rebuked the kinsman for deceiving the apparent stranger; the kinsman had presented himself to Euripides as a wife who has taken refuge at a tomb or altar in order to escape being forced to lie with a tyrant. Kritylla enlightens Euripides by telling him that the would-be woman is a man who has come to the women's assem-

bly in the guise of a woman in order to steal gold from the women; she conceals the kinsman's defense of Euripides, which did not end too well for the women. Even after she has realized that the alleged stranger is an accomplice of the guilty man, Kritylla takes it for granted that the kinsman alone will undergo punishment: The original purpose of the women's assembly is forgotten.

The *Helen* scene is as much a failure as the kinsman's snatching and debunking of the alleged baby. That action of the kinsman had led to the proof by deed of the women's badness, and therewith to the women's admission in the parabasis that despite their alleged superiority they must bow to the *nomos* proclaiming their inferiority. Similarly the *Helen* scene proves the superiority of Euripides; he succeeds perfectly in deceiving Kritylla as to his identity, although she knows that the kinsman had been sent to the women's assembly by Euripides and that the alleged Menelaos is an accomplice of the kinsman. Euripides succeeds perfectly in concealing himself. On a different plane the *Helen* scene constitutes a victory of Euripides, since it refutes completely, if tacitly, the women's charge that Euripides hates women. In the *Helen* Euripides vindicates the chastity of the woman most maligned for her lack of chastity; the only other important female character in the *Helen*, Theonoe, is piety and justice incarnate, while the evil character in the play is a man. The use of the *Helen* thus prepares still further the final reconciliation of Euripides and the women.

The magistrate, acting by the authority of the Council, makes clear at least in the kinsman's view that the poor man will be capitally punished. For the time being he is only disgraced; the magistrate commands the archer to take the kinsman indoors and bind him to a plank, then to expose him outdoors, watching him carefully and using the whip on anyone who might dare to approach him. He is not even granted his wish not to be exposed to the viewers in his ridiculous garb; he is to be held up to laughter before being executed; he has lost all hope of being saved. While he is being bound to the plank indoors, i.e., while he is absent, the chorus chants the praise of some gods (Apollon, Artemis, Hera, Hermes, Pan, the nymphs, Dionysos). It assigns the central place no longer to Artemis, but to Hermes. The chorus explicitly refuses to speak ill of the men: Although the men were taught by Euripides to deny that there are gods, they after all punish the kinsman in deference to the women's wishes. The chorus is silent as to divine punishment. The kinsman seems to be utterly lost, yet the reconciliation between the women and Euripides silently progresses.

The kinsman, bound to the plank and suspended, is brought outdoors

by the archer, who treats him cruelly. His situation reminds us of that of Prometheus in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Given the fact that the kinsman will soon be liberated by Euripides without any divine help, his resemblance to Prometheus suggests that "the gods and savior Zeus" invoked by the kinsman in his agony (1009) are, to say the least, much less powerful than they are according to Aeschylus. While the archer leaves briefly to attend to his comfort, Euripides signals to the kinsman that he should become Andromeda, who had been bound to a rock by her father in order to be devoured by a monster for the appeasement of Hera and Poseidon, while Euripides himself will be Perseus, who saved Andromeda and married her; the *Andromeda*, like the *Helen*, was a recent work of the poet. Yet, while the conceit to use the *Palamedes* and the *Helen* had been the kinsman's, the conceit to use the *Andromeda* is Euripides'. The kinsman-Andromeda bitterly complains about his (her) lot. Addressing the women, he speaks of his imploring the help of the man who shaved him, dressed him as a woman, and sent him to the temple where the women are. That is to say, for the first time he admits to the women his crime and above all the fact that he is not the chief culprit. One wonders whether he is not trying to achieve his liberation at the expense of Euripides. The poet next turns into the nymph Echo, another character of his *Andromeda*: In order to overcome or win over the women, he himself must become a female being. The voice of Echo that the kinsman hears tells him that she was Euripides' helper last year in the very place where they now are, i.e., in the theater; Euripides destroys the dramatic illusion more than anyone else in the *Thesmophoriazusai*. As Echo he echoes first the pitiable complaints that the kinsman-Andromeda utters at his command in order to arouse the women's compassion; yet the kinsman, annoyed by the echoing, abuses Euripides as "old woman" and curses him. Euripides' echoing of the kinsman proves however to be only preparatory to his echoing of the archer, which begins on the archer's return. The archer is genuinely confused by the voice, whose origin he does not clearly discern; he is led to believe that one of the women is teasing him. While he turns his attention and his rage toward that woman, Euripides appears as Perseus, claiming to approach Andromeda, a virgin as beautiful as a goddess, through the ether; for echoing sounds is not sufficient to loosen fetters. Andromeda beseeches the stranger to free her from her bonds. But however stupid the archer may be, he is not so stupid as to be blind to the difference between a young girl and an old man; even Euripides' speech is powerless against the testimony of the barbarian's eyes in

this matter, and this despite the fact that he is willing to grant that Euripides is in love with the being bound to the plank. He surely refuses to permit Euripides to unfetter the kinsman. Euripides leaves with a resolve to use a device fit to persuade a barbarian nature. The *Andromeda* scene ends then, just like the *Helen* scene, in failure. Yet Euripides himself has now for the first time become a female being; he has succeeded in coming near to the kinsman despite the magistrate's strict prohibition and in fact in entering the women's assembly; and he has learned now how he must handle the archer. Above all, since the *Andromeda* scene turns more and more into an exchange between the sophisticated poet and the barbaric archer, the contrast between the two men—between Greek poetry and barbaric jargon—can not but have an effect favorable to Euripides on the Athenian women.

After Euripides has left to figure out how to save the kinsman, the chorus chants another song in praise of some goddesses. In its capacity as the *demos* of women it first calls on Athena, who detests tyrants. It then calls on Demeter and Persephone, whose solemn celebrations may not be viewed by men. This is the first time that the chorus calls solemnly on some gods, and in particular on Demeter and Persephone, in the presence of the kinsman known to the chorus to be a man. It is no longer necessary for the chorus to say as it said in the preceding song that it will not speak evil of men (960–64). It does not even allude to the kinsman's impious act.

After all his failures which, as we have seen, are not simply failures, Euripides no longer delays to offer peace to the women with the promise that he will not speak evil of them in the future. The women do not reject the proposal: They are no longer set on punishing him for the evil that he has done them. They only wish to know what kind of need induces him to make his offer. He tells them that the man bound to the plank is his kinsman; if he sets him free, no evil will be said any more about the women; but if the women do not give in, the poet will tell their husbands after their return from the army what their wives have been doing while they were away.⁸¹ He thus tells the women that his power to harm them is not exhausted by what he has said about them already; he merely restates what the kinsman had told them in his speech defending the poet. The women, who remember the effect of the speech on themselves, as well as the fact that the only woman who was not paralyzed by the kinsman's speech was discredited by the kinsman very soon afterward when her alleged baby proved to be a wine flask, accept Euripides' proposal forthwith. The poet's knowledge of the ways of women, his ability to

make these ways publicly known, and his ability to imitate women give him a power over them that saves him. This is not to deny that he proves to be unable to disarm the women without making an important concession to them. Since he has failed to persuade Agathon to defend him in the women's assembly, he is compelled to rest satisfied with the second-best solution to his difficulty. Being compelled to substitute his kinsman for Agathon, he succeeds in preventing his own condemnation only at the price of exposing his kinsman to mortal peril; and he can not save his kinsman without making a grave concession to his persecutors. The women refuse however to free the kinsman from the danger threatening him at the hands of the archer: Euripides must persuade the archer to let his kinsman go. This is the only punishment that the women inflict on him. The poet has anticipated this state of things. He has brought with him a dancing girl and a flute girl, and he presents himself to the archer as an old procuress. The arts of the dancer, who has been well instructed by the poet on the way to the temple, and of the flute player are more than sufficient to arouse the barbarian's desire and thus to make him forget his guard duty. Following instructions, the dancing girl runs away, pursued by the archer. While he is removed from the stage, Euripides unfetters his kinsman and both men escape. The women do not interfere. When the archer returns and sees that he has been fooled, the women misinform him as to which way the kinsmen went and thus contribute their share to Euripides' salvation: Far from being punished by the women, the poet is saved by them. The song with which the chorus ends the play reminds us as much as possible of the ending of the *Clouds*.

In the course of the play the crime of speaking evil of the women for which they persecute Euripides is almost forgotten, and the concern of the women shifts to the sacrilege committed by his kinsman, although or because the kinsman has aggravated the crime of speaking evil of the women by addressing the women in the guise of a woman. Yet Euripides himself is guilty of a much more serious crime than speaking evil of women: He has spoken evil of the gods, for he has taught men that there are no gods. This gravest of all crimes is mentioned only in passing. Furthermore, although Euripides has persuaded the men that there are no gods, the men persecute him or his kinsman for an act of impiety. How can these things be understood? What is the connection between speaking evil of women and speaking evil of the gods? If it is true that the poet has persuaded the men that there are no gods, only the women now believe that there are gods. While there is agreement between Euripides

and the men, there is the most profound disagreement between Euripides and the women: He hates the women, he speaks evil of them, and the women respond in kind. Sacrilege is still a punishable offense because the city preserves divine worship, if only for the sake of the women; the gods are indeed by *nomos*, but more particularly by a *nomos* required for the sake of women or produced by virtue of women. This state of things is adumbrated in a manner in the parabasis, in which the women present themselves as by nature superior to men but as bound to the *nomos* that proclaims their inferiority to men: Men, by nature superior to the gods, may bow to the *nomos* that proclaims their inferiority to the gods. The enforcement of the law regarding impiety will then depend to some extent on how much the women insist in a given case on that enforcement. Hence Euripides' power over the women suffices for his escaping persecution by the city.

Yet even if we knew only the *Clouds* we would know that the hypothesis underlying the *Thesmophoriazusai* is impossible: Euripides can not possibly have persuaded the city, the *demos*, that there are no gods; an atheistic city is even more impossible, one might say, than Peisthetairos' becoming the successor of Zeus, to say nothing more of the possibility of a *deus ex machina*, and to say nothing of the impossibility of women having criminal jurisdiction over men speaking evil of them. The utmost that Euripides could have achieved would be to persuade some men of the truth of atheism; his attempt to persuade the city of it would only have led to his ruin, unless he gained the men's favor by making himself the mouthpiece of a sentiment as dear to them as the belief in gods, like hatred of women. We recall the old men in the *Lysistrata* speaking of "the women hated by Euripides and all gods" (283). To speak more seriously, Euripides might have converted a part of the city to his sentiment; like Dikaiopolis he would have saved himself by splitting the city. In the *Lysistrata* the difference between men and women corresponded to the difference between the war party and the peace party. Let us see what follows if one assumes that in the present play the difference between men and women corresponds to the difference between those men who deny and those men who assert that there are gods, as illustrated by the difference between Demosthenes and Nikias in the *Knights*. The "manly" kind of man would of course defer, within reason, to the sentiments of the "womanly" kind and therefore continue to treat impiety as a crime, but punish it only when the latter kind insisted on punishment; one can imagine a situation in which a man guilty of impiety can exert pressure

on the part inimical to him so as to bring about his acquittal. At any rate, the *Thesmophoriazusai* does not contradict Aristophanes' claim that he does not treat women comically (cf. p. 213).

The *Thesmophoriazusai*, if contrasted with the *Clouds*, shows the superiority of the poet, at least of the dramatic poet, who is able to appear in various disguises, to the philosopher, to the man who worries so much about the things aloft and therefore lacks that ability. The dramatic poet, who can speak evil (or well) of and hence do evil (or good) to his enemies (or friends), wields power. It is not necessary to repeat what was said when we considered Peisthetairos' treating the poet better than the astronomer. The *Thesmophoriazusai* presents Euripides' success: The concession that he makes to the women fades into insignificance if seen in the light of his escaping capital punishment. His failure is presented in the *Frogs*. It remains to be seen whether that failure throws any light on the relation between tragic and comic poetry.

75. 85 and 181-82; cf. *Acharnians* 630-31 and *Wasps* 1284-91.

76. Of course not on Sicily (446); cf. *Lysistrata* 590.

77. 454; *Clouds* 1508-9.

78. *Republic* 396^e2.

79. Cf. Dikaiopolis' account of the origin of the Peloponnesian War in *Acharnians* 523-29.

80. Cf. above, p. 208.

81. Cf. above, p. 222.